THEOLOGY DIGEST

WHAT BLIND WOMEN HAVE DONE!

by

Jean-Marie J. Bauchet, Ph. D.

CONTENTS

Page

PART I. About Oriental Blind Girls

Story of Pretty 1
White Flower 2
Armenouhee 3
Pastourelle 4
Melanie 8
Courageous 10
Epilogue of Courageous 14
Grace-of-God 15
Divine-Oath 17
Supervisor 18
Bright 19
Beautiful 21
Justitia 22
Lady 23
Wisdom 24

PART II. About Occidental Blind Girls

Pearl 27
Mireille 28
Alberta, Evelyn and Rita (More about Catching Snakes) 29
Anna and Lucy 30
Mercy 31
Fabiola 33
Nelly 34
Patricia 34
Barbara 35
Louise and Gaby 35
Claudia and Bernadette 36
Clementine 37
Clare-Mary and Mary Clare 37
Jeannette 38

PART III. General Survey on the Question of the Religious Vocations of the Blind

The New Era for the Blind 39
The Works of the Blind in a Monastery 43

Voorhees
Wise

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by

Jean-Marie J. Bauchet, Ph. D.

Nihil Obstat,
Rev. John P. Haran S. J., Censor Librorum,
December 6, 1957

IMPRIMATUR,
Most Reverend John J. Wright, D. D., Bishop of Worcester,
December 6, 1957

Dedicated

to

Rt. Reverend Monsignor Joseph B. Frey

Director

of the

Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood

Brooklyn, N. Y.

as a token of sincere and respectful gratitude

J-M. J. B.

February 2, 1957

FOREWORD

The stories that you will read in this booklet are true; but the names, with rare exceptions, have been changed to protect the privacy of the individual.

The author of this pamphlet, Fr. Jean-Marie J. Bauchet, is happy in helping any kind of "difficult vocation" (age, birth, health, etc.).

More than 383 cases have been submitted (August 15, 1957) 95 placed or seriously helped, and 72 are actually persevering.

PART I

ABOUT ORIENTAL BLIND GIRLS

STORY OF "PRETTY"

She was an eleven year old Armenian girl, and her eyesight was perfect. At that time, however, a religious persecution broke out in her village. When the infidel (Moslem) soldiers came to her poor home, they discovered a fifteen year old girl called *Malka* (Queen) with her. The soldiers said to Malka: *"Renounce your religion or we shall cut your throat."* The girl replied firmly, *"Never"*. A soldier then slashed her throat with a sword. In relating the incident, Pretty told me, *"I heard her say, 'Oh'! and then she died."*

When the murderers saw Pretty, they did not dare treat her in the same manner; instead they bound her feet with a rope and let her down, head first, into a muddy cistern, so that the foul waters covered her eyes. And they went farther in their work of persecution.

About an hour later, when the French soldiers came to the assistance of the persecuted, they found the little girl hanging, as we described, in the cistern. She was not dead, but *she remained blind for the remainder of her life*. I met her thirty years later and she told me of her wish to become a nun. Unfortunately circumstances did not allow her to fulfill this desire. Nevertheless, I think that her story is worth recounting.

NOTE:— In some areas of the world where the climate is very warm, blindness is brought about by many reasons: epidemics, dirt, sun, flies, dust, and sometimes cruelty. We met a little blind child, ten years old, whose mother had pierced her eyes when she was a baby. The name of the girl signifies "Morning-Full" or "Grace of the Morning". But she did not know how she became blind.

In these countries *it is considered a curse from Heaven to have a blind girl,* and these poor children are often abandoned.

WHITE FLOWER

"White Flower" is but one of many blind girls who are now serving as Religious in Europe and America. It was because of her that I became the spiritual Father to this group now numbering more than twenty.

One day in a distant land, as I was going to a big hospice to perform religious services, a blind girl of twenty-seven stopped me as I was passing and said, "Father, I have something to tell you. Ever since I was a little girl, *I have wished to become a Religious,* and everyone said that this dream was impossible. What do you think of it?"

I said: "My daughter, ask God what His will is in this matter, and make a novena to any saint of your choice."

She listened to my words and chose to make a novena to St. Gertrude. (She knew that I was encouraging this devotion). At the end of the novena the Superior of a new Order arrived at this hospice. A priest whom I consulted about vocations for the Blind said to me at this time: "Why don't you tell this girl to contact this Mother General? Probably she would be interested".

After speaking to the girl, the Mother General was pleased and said: *"We have never taken blind postulants before, but we shall try this for the first time and we shall see".* The result was that this first trial was very satisfactory. She completed her postulancy and novitiate successfully and took her religious vows. She became later a missionary Sister and served for some time in a very wild place of Africa.

This was the first blind girl I directed to a postulancy. At the same time, in this large institution, more than fifty other blind women were sheltered. When they saw that a "religious vocation" was open to them, after the departure of White Flower five others asked me to help them enter religious life. It happened that the second girl, Pastourelle, began her novitiate in another congregation a short time before White Flower. The following is a translation of a letter White Flower wrote her in Braille on that occasion:

Dear Sister Pastourelle:

I am very happy to write you on this joyous occasion. First of all, I want to send you my very best greetings and to congratulate you upon taking your garb of novice. You have done better than I have, since the Lord permitted you to take it before me. I am rejoicing with you. Please ask Our Lord to give me a little share of the graces He will abundantly grant you, and because the Little Jesus will not refuse you anything on that day, ask Him to give both

of us the grace of loving Him with the greatest possible love. I have not as yet chosen the country where I will work in the missions, but I am considering Japan. This is not yet certain, however. I recommend to your prayers and to those of your community my poor Dad, who has left this world. I was deeply grieved at his death, so I have asked God to watch more closely over me now that I no longer have a father on earth.

You are a beautiful flower protected by the fences of a cloister. (Pastourelle is in a contemplative order). The noises of the world do not reach you, and you are as protected as the beautiful roses are protected by their own thorns. I, on the contrary, am a very tiny little flower planted on the roadway of the world where anyone may pick it up because I am destined to spread along the roadside the divine perfume of Love. Waiting for your answer, I kiss you very affectionately.

White Flower

THE STORY OF ARMENOUHEE

This story is also quite true, but just the contrary of White Flower. White Flower was a bright and clever girl, but without much formal education. Armenouhee, however, was a very talented and educated blind person, capable of playing musical instruments and singing beautifully. She was a teacher in a School for the Blind. When she learned that White Flower was thinking of a religious life, she began to ridicule her: "She will go, yes, but she will return quickly enough."

But the queerest thing was this: She learned that White Flower was praying to St. Gertrude and had obtained many graces through her intercession. She, Armenouhee, had grown up in an atmosphere very hostile to the German people and she declared: *"Well, pray to your St. Gertrude as much as you like. She is a German saint. As for me, I will not pray to a German saint. Am I not free to do as I like?"*

And so she did as she wished. But the end of her story is equally instructive. After the departure of White Flower five other blind girls succeeded in entering different convents. At the beginning she laughed at them: "They go because they don't like the work they are doing (they washed linen every day), but they do not have vocations. So we shall see them returning before long."

After a time she reflected within herself — perhaps believing that she was better than these other poor blind girls who were successful in becoming postulants and novices: "Why shouldn't I try

the religious life?" She was not so old, and she certainly could be more useful than they were. So, one day, without my knowledge, she started for a big novitiate where they had received a number of blind postulants.

The result was this: She, the talented young lady "better than the others," had not the courage to accept the trial of real religious life generously; and a few months later she returned to her own country. Later, she realized she did not possess docility to the grace of God. She tried to return to the novitiate, but the doors were firmly closed this time. "I fear that Jesus is passing and will not return."

So, this is the true story of the gifted blind girl who refused to pray to St. Gertrude "because she was a German saint." Of the other six blind whom she did not think had vocations, five have taken their religious vows.

NOTE:— I was obliged to place these blind in a foreign country because there was no congregation receiving blind postulants in their own region. These blind girls were so generous and sincere in their desire to consecrate their lives to God that they did not hesitate to expatriate themselves in order to accomplish this divine aim. However, they felt sorrow when leaving to go abroad and White Flower wrote to me when embarked:

"It caused me a great deal of pain to leave my own country and all that I have known and loved. However, (they were on the deck of a boat opposite a sanctuary dedicated to the Blessed Mother) *we gladly sang a Salve Regina!"*

This blind girl had very slight perception, not of color but of light. She continued in this same letter: *"At night, on the boat, I see the reflection of the lights of the boat in the waves.* (She probably saw the lights as very tiny sparks on a black background.) *It is truly a wonderful spectacle."*

That was the *only* thing she could see of the things of this world.

PASTOURELLE

Pastourelle is our second "blind daughter", amongst the twenty-four whom we have had the grace to help in entering religious life. She was born in a family of several children (at least eight, I believe). They were rather wealthy and could, had they wished, have kept this daughter with them; but, as I explained before, in these countries a blind girl is regarded as a malediction and they preferred to send her to a hospice rather than keep her at home. Oc-

casionally Pastourelle spent a few days at home. But she soon realized her family was unwilling to keep her, and she would come back weeping secretly at her misfortune. She came to know that it was principally *her mother* who did not want her at home.

In her family, the girls outnumbered the boys. I remember that one of them was called *"Perfume"*. But in this country, the girls are not much appreciated. It is their custom to say: *"We have three children, and five daughters.* (Daughters are not counted as the "children".)

I remember a striking example of this same sentiment. It occurred somewhere in Mesopotamia. A mother had given birth to a girl. The father wanted only boys and became enraged. He spat in the face of his wife saying: "And this is what you gave me!"

But let us go back to Pastourelle. She was in the hospice for the blind, unhappy, but praying with her whole heart for the happiness and well-being of her family (who were so hard-hearted towards her). When she learned that White Flower had entered a religious Congregation, she told me that she would be very happy if she could do the same. I told her to pray fervently in order to learn what her vocation really was. During this time, I received a letter from a monastery in a distant land sending me alms for my missionary works. I thanked them and told them of the case of Pastourelle and a few other blind girls who wanted to join a religious order. They wrote back: "Give us a description of these girls, and we shall choose the one we shall accept." I replied: "The first one knows German." (The monastery was in a place where German is the common language.) "The second is a musician who plays the harmonium; the third is so and so." And, as for Pastourelle, I told them what I knew positively. "About the last, her more dominant quality is that she is happy in serving and helping ill people."

By return mail, I received a letter: *"We accept the blind girl who is happy in helping ill people."* When I told Pastourelle of the result, she decided to start as soon as possible. It was a great decision for her to make. She was entering a contemplative order, and she knew that she would never again see her family, which was so dear to her heart. But she was strong in her resolution and showed it in a bright way. At that time, I was no longer able to go to hear confessions at that hospice, but remained in a Church at the opposite end of town. Pastourelle had not disclosed her secret to anyone and when she asked her Superior for permission to go to confession to such a far removed place, it appeared to be an unusual request.

"What idea have you that you must do differently from the others and go to confession so far away?" she asked. "I don't like

your walking such a distance." (In fact, this good Superior did not remember the directive of Canon Law in favor of the freedom of conscience for confession.)

Pastourelle answered quietly, but firmly: *"Reverend Mother, I need to go there for the sake of my conscience, and I can not renounce doing so".*

So the Reverend Mother let her go. But I see now that if the girl had not been firm on this point (as she had a right to be) surely she would not be a religious at the present time, and probably others (we shall speak of them later) would have missed their religious vocation forever. In this country, there was at that time no other priest interested in religious vocations of blind girls.

And this was Pastourelle's problem. Her parents gave her written authorization to enter this convent, but neither she nor I had the large sum of money necessary to pay her travelling expenses. I asked the monastery for advice and they answered: "A working girl of our town who wishes to be a missionary has heard that Pastourelle needs money for her journey, and she is sending you all her savings to use for this purpose."

This sum, however, was only part of the amount she needed, but with the help of an *American friend,* I succeeded in meeting the expenses of her trip.

It was decided that she would take an airplane and the monastery receiving her would send a friend to meet her at nearest airport.

In the meantime, we were waiting for her visa. During this same period, the Mother Superior, who had learned of her future departure, became very nervous. It was true that the parents of Pastourelle had given their written permission, but the Superior was afraid that, she was at least responsible "in cause" and this was the reason why she was so nervous about Pastourelle. What should she do? Perhaps she should go and explain the case to the Archbishop and perhaps she hoped that the Archbishop would "forbid" the departure, and her "responsibility" would be eliminated. In order to reach the Archbishop, it was necessary to cross a frontier which presented many complications and formalities. None the less, she started for the place where the Archbishop resided. Now (as so many times in the Gospel) the events will prove *how Our Lord loves the poor blind.* When the Mother Superior arrived at the place where the Archbishop lived, a political murder had occurred which had aroused a great furor in the local government and they issued a formal order that no one was authorized to cross the frontier again. And so, *thanks (?) to the murder of an infidel by another infidel,* Pastourelle in the meantime quickly and forever left her native

country by another route. When the frontier was opened again after some weeks, the Reverend Mother found the *"bird" flown away.* The other Sisters had said to Pastourelle: "Poor little thing, but you *cannot* go away during the absence of our Mother." She answered, *"I must start,"* and she did.

I was at the airport when she left the country; and, not without emotion, I saw the plane becoming a little golden point flying away in the sunny sky. It was like a symbol of the vocation of the poor blind: *Leaving the muddy earth for a heaven full of eternal light.* This girl, who also prayed so fervently to St. Gertrude for her vocation, later received, without requesting it, the name of Sister Mary Gertrude. She was the first (even before White Flower) to receive the religious cloth of a novice. She wrote me sometime later as follows:

"Good Father: I am so very happy for this great grace that God has granted me — to live the same life as the saintly souls of this Monastery, living in the love of God and pouring into my soul a sweet odor by their virtue and example. Therefore, no day goes by that I do not say many times over: "Blessed be Thou, O my God, for bringing me here! May I end my life in this place learning how to love and serve You. Grant me, my God, to be obedient like a host in the hands of the priest."

She prayed a great deal for her family, and God granted through her intercession a great favor she had asked for her family long before she joined a religious order.

When I obtained parcels for the blind of the hospice, Pastourelle received a very fine dress from the U.S.A. She was so pleased with it that the next Sunday she wore it and walked (accompanied by one who was not blind) three miles to a famous sanctuary our Our Lady of the Visitation and three miles back. Six months later, she was wearing the garb of a postulant in a Visitation Monastery.

The convent which received Pastourelle, desiring to attract the blessing of God on their novitiate, accepted another blind postulant a few days later (but not from among my blind daughters). From that time, their novitiate became more prosperous than it had ever been before.

This is not the only case of this sort. Several times, I have remarked that the novitiates receiving blind postulants, *"asking the blessing of God on their novitiate,"* have been abundantly rewarded in the following years.

Others reason *"a priori"* and say *"We are an active Congregation, and so it is absolutely impossible for us to accept a blind postulant."* My answer is this: I have placed many blind postulants

(seven in contemplative Orders and more than fifteen in active Orders), and *no* active Congregation accepting a blind postulant (with the required permission or dispensation, if necessary) was obliged to send her back to her family because of lack of ability, or usefulness to the Community. They say their prayers using a Braille book, help themselves, and are truly useful members in the Community.

MELANIE

When we recount stories of *"What Blind Women Have Done,'* we do not intend to give only examples of high virtues. Sometimes a black background is very expressive in order to better sense or appreciate other colors. So Melanie will be our darkest background in order that we may better appreciate some very nice flowers.

Twenty years ago I heard some people saying: "Oh, this blind person, *she is very wicked.*" At that time, I did not believe them, but now I have learned the truth that even blind can be *"wicked people."* But they have their blindness for an excuse. It is far easier to have *false ideas* if you are blind than if you are one who had normal vision.

I visited the hospice where I met Pretty, White Flower and Pastourelle, as well as many other blind girls, almost every Sunday over a long period of time and sometimes more often than once a week. It was necessary at times to bring Communion to an old, infirm Sister at an hour when the regular chaplain was not free. I noticed very quickly that there was a deep chasm between the blind girls called the *laundry girls"* and the others in a more educated group called *"the knitters"*. The knitters, as a rule, were older than the laundry girls, and considered themselves a superior *"class"* (of society) to the laundry girls and they did not want to associate with them. While I was trying to do some good to the knitters, the laundry girls would turn away from me; and when I was doing the same to the laundry girls, the knitters, in turn, did not like it at all. So, one day, seeing their dissension, I told them: *"My dear children, indeed you are my crown of thorns"*.

The chief cause of the dissension was one blind girl in particular, whom we shall call Melanie, a Greek name meaning the "black one." The doctor told me that probably there was some physical reason to explain her conduct, but I am sure she would have been the last one to admit that this opinion of the doctor was true. (The doctor explained to me that her own tendencies put her in some mental state in which the natural or supernatural reason was overwhelmed or controlled by her natural feelings. She was absolutely dominated by these *"feelings"* and nothing else! Perhaps some people who are not blind are also ruled in this same way!)

Melanie was not the *"mistress"* of the Blind (the mistress was a blind elderly lady), but she had such a temper that she was not satisfied unless every one around her acted according to her own will. So, if I had allowed myself to be dominated by her and to become one of Melanie's *"directed"*, I should have been (for her) a *Messenger from Heaven,* but since I did not accept this "direction" or domination, I was to become a *"Messenger of Hell."* In fact, everyone in the hospice feared her and the doctor told me: "Do not think that the Mistress of the blind is commanding the blind here, or the Sister in charge of the blind, or even the Superior of the Community. Here, in fact, *only one person is in command and it is Melanie."*

At the beginning (when I first started to visit the blind) Melanie was all sweetness in my presence because she hoped I would become an iron rod in her hands in order *"to beat"* into submission anyone who resisted her "directives" and domination. She wanted a complete victory for the knitters over the laundry girls.

During this time a war was ravaging the country, and I saw that the blind in general did not receive an adequate diet. They had a plate of vegetables (sometimes small pieces of eggs or meat were added) for their noon meal, and for their evening meal a plate of soup, with a radish or something similar. Truly, any Trappist monk was better fed. I had friends *in America* and other countries, so I wrote them in order to obtain parcels of food for those who, the doctor confided, were more feeble and in danger of becoming ill. These parcels were the beginning of my struggle with Melanie. Among the names given me by the doctor were those of several laundry girls, and this displeased Melanie very much. If I had directed all the parcels to Melanie, and if she had been permitted to distribute them according to her own wishes, all would have been serene. But to send these parcels to laundry girls, even on the advice of the doctor, was *unthinkable* in her eyes. She was very clever and cunning. I was aware of this strife, but I acted as though I did not perceive it. I even tried to help her and wrote some letters for her to her family abroad. But nothing helped so long as I helped the laundry girls. When she saw that she could not obtain by submission in this matter, she decided to have me *"expelled"* completely from the hospice.

She began to speak against me on every occasion and won the complicity of a good part of the knitters. One day a benefactor sent me a parcel for the blind addressed to the hospice, and believing I was the Director of these blind wrote my name on the package adding the title "Director of the Blind". However, I was only a kind of temporary assistant; the director was a very old priest, half-blind himself. Melanie heard of this parcel addressed to me as "Director of the Blind", and was crying everywhere — "See this priest — he is

not director, nevertheless he wants to be called 'Director of the Blind'. It is a scandal, etc."

Melanie was most certainly wrong, but she cried so loud and so persistently that it was better for me not to return to the hospice and I did not. But it was not easy after this for my former spiritual daughters to accomplish their desire for a religious life. We shall see how Providence managed, however, in order that no one of His lambs be lost. When I think of it now, I feel that *the hand of God was very strong, assisting me in all these circumstances.*

COURAGEOUS

She was born of Moslem parents and when they discovered she was blind, they did not want her. They asked someone to take the baby to a Catholic orphanage. When the Sisters asked the name of the child, in order to hide the true name of her family, they answered: "*Her father's name is 'Courageous'.* "

She was received with joy by the Sisters and because her parents no longer claimed her, she was baptized "*Mary Courageous*" and grew up in the Catholic faith. She was, notwithstanding her blindness, a very pretty girl, and one Sister in particular loved her dearly. Probably she prayed a great deal for the future of the little girl and these secret prayers are very likely the cause of her wonderful blessing.

When she was 24, Courageous studied the piano and harmonium successfully during the rare moments she was free from her work in the laundry. She was not happy because she felt in her soul that something was missing in her life. When it became evident that White Flower and Pastourelle were resolute in their decision to enter religious life, she prayed in order to know the will of God, and little by little became convinced that this was the Will of God for her, too. When I felt she was determined I began to search for a place for her.

At this moment, Melanie waged her great battle against me. She aroused the minds of the people in the hospice against me so that it was best for me to remain away from there.

When Courageous, and three other blind girls who also wished to join a religious order, knew that I would not return to the hospice to hear their confessions, they felt as though their desire for a religious life was clouded forever and would never be realized. For days they wept, anguish flowing from their broken hearts. I was told that *Courageous did not eat at all for two days;* she was so prostrated at this news. But Divine-Oath, one of the other blind girls (we shall tell her story later) saved the situation. She said

to the other three: "Since Father can no longer come to the hospice, then we will go to the Church where he is."

Those at the hospice were so astonished by their strong determination that no one was willing to accompany them. But Divine-Oath said boldly: *"We have no one to guide us, but never mind. We shall go out into the street and trust ourselves to the grace of God."* And so they did. (These details are entirely true, and not at all fictitious). So they went out of the hospice, joining hands. A man came along and asked them where they were going and they told him and this Good Samaritan led them to the church where I was hearing confessions. The next time, I found an old *charitable Jewess* who agreed to lead them from the hospice to confession and back again after their confession. In the meantime, the Jewess sat quietly in the back of the Church and you would have thought that she was "a very pious Catholic person." In fact, this Jewess was a "causa instrumentalis" that God used to save three religious vocations. I was so grateful that I later obtained for her and her family much needed *"Care Parcels"*.

Let us go back to Courageous. She also prayed devoutly to St. Gertrude and on November 16, the feast day of St. Gertrude, the last of the papers necessary for her departure arrived.

A few days later I accompanied her to the airport. On the day of her departure she was so happy and so eager to start as soon as possible that she did not eat any lunch. She had to pass before me in order to reach the scales, and I remember that she weighed only about eighty pounds! An old Christian lady was in our company. The departure of the plane was changed, and after a while the old lady lost her patience and said to me: "You will have to take care of this blind girl yourself. I am obliged to return to town." When she left, Courageous said: "Ah, Father, at last I am able to speak freely to you." I asked her: "Before starting abroad to enter religious life, tell me if there is anything troubling you."

She continued: *"Father, I have only one fear in entering the Convent. All my life I have said the rosary every day. I am afraid that they will not permit me to continue this devotion in the Convent where I am going."*

So the only fear that this poor blind girl had in entering religious life was "not to be able to say the rosary every day."

Like White Flower and Pastourelle, she had so little luggage that it could have been carried *in one hand* without difficulty. She had not yet taken the vow of poverty but, in fact, she was poorer than the poorest religious.

Unexpectedly, her plane stopped at Rome for a few hours, and she wrote me that she was very happy about this incident.

But the story of Courageous was not finished. She arrived at the Monastery for the feast of the Immaculate Conception to begin her religious life.

Unfortunately, this monastery had no experience in the training of blind postulants, and the Mother Superior held it as a principle that postulants must be firmly disciplined in order *to test* their vocation. She knew that Courageous had washed linen every day of the week, morning till night, so she reasoned "The best way to test this vocation is to put her washing linen again." However, Courageous had to work *alone,* and for a blind girl of 24, it was an especially hard trial to be without a companion for hours. When the Superior saw that the poor girl was downcast as a result of this treatment, she did not understand and thought she had no vocation. So she said to Courageous: "You can see for yourself that you have no vocation. With your consent, I shall write to Father and tell him that you cannot remain here, *because you feel you do not have a vocation."*

The Mother Superior wrote me in this vein. I was puzzled because only a few days before this I had received a letter from Courageous in Braille which was quite normal in tone, in which she spoke confidently of her vocation. This matter had to be cleared up as I was leaving the Mission Land for America. Happily I managed to visit the monastery where Courageous was stationed. I had requested the Mother Superior to wait until I came, before any decision was reached on the future of the girl. In fact, I sacrificed the possibility of visiting Rome because of this vocation, but Providence blessed this sacrifice abundantly. I remained firmly convinced that the failure of this postulant could be attributed to the lack of understanding on the part of Mother Superior who did not know how to treat a blind novice. I felt that it would be best to place Courageous in another Convent. A good lady, who, after her own daughter died at the age of ten, consecrated all her free time to assisting vocations, helped me with my problem. She obtained permission for Courageous to be admitted to another postulancy in a neighboring country. However, the ecclesiastical superior, for some reason, made this condition: "We accept her, but we do not want the monastery she is leaving to learn of this." It was, of course, an embarrassing situation. But in due course we solved the problem. First, we asked the Superior of an institute for the blind to take Courageous for a few days — just the time necessary to accomplish the transfer of novitiates so that the first monastery would not learn of our intention.

I visited the Superior and told her that Courageous, as she wished, would be removed from the monastery, and begged her to do whatever was necessary in order that she might be sent to this Institute for the Blind. I also saw Courageous and my opinion that

she still had a vocation was confirmed; she had always really wanted to be a religious and had by no means abandoned the desire in her soul of giving her life to God. I then told her she had been accepted in another novitiate but the ecclesiastical superior had asked that no mention be made to the Sisters where she was staying.

When I left Courageous, she had a struggle with her conscience. The Mistress of Novices had told her that a good postulant did not hide anything from her Superiors, and Courageous understood that to do the contrary was some kind of sin. Poor Courageous did not want to sin in any way, and in the end the struggle proved too strong for her and she decided it was her duty to tell the truth to the Mistress of Novices.

When the Mother Superior learned that Courageous was leaving for another novitiate she took the affair *very badly* and did everything possible to make me change my mind. I tried to explain that "When an ecclesiastical superior requests a person to remain silent, does one have the right to do otherwise?" But she did not seem to understand. Finally I said: "You realize that I have offered to take Courageous; now, if you prefer to keep the girl forever, you may do so." This argument was most convincing and the Superior permitted Courageous to start out as I had planned.

In the interim, while transferring from one monastery to another, Courageous received the grace to visit Lourdes and she wrote to me: "I am very happy to be able to visit Lourdes, and shall pray that my sight may be restored. But if the Blessed Mother does not want to cure me, *I accept my own infirmity forever for the conversion of Russia.*" She remained blind.

In her new monastery, she found Superiors who understood the temperament of the girl and she completed this second postulancy most successfully. She has made her first religious vows and the Superior was so satisfied with her that she accepted another of our blind daughters as a postulant.

Courageous realized that it was a result of her blindness that she found the true Religion, and she told me: "*It is a great blessing of God that I was born blind,* because otherwise I would never have received the grace to know the true Religion."

Her letters show a deep touch of supernatural life. She wrote to me before taking her vows: (translation) "*It truly shows the infinite mercy of God that He has chosen a miserable creature like me* (a little *Moslem* baby)... *Eternity will not be sufficiently long for me to sing a hymn of gratitude to this all-loving God ..... my gratitude for so many graces and most especially for my vocation.*" (To better understand this, one must remember the state of slavery

and turpitude that is the ordinary condition of women in the Moslem world).

We quote further from her letters: *"I have an ardent desire to consecrate myself wholly to the Sacred Heart. I wish to breathe and live only for Him, to aspire only to His love. May this adorable Heart, full of divine Love, kindle me, burn me, consume me in His love. Above all, I want to make Him loved in this world. He will be the only King of my heart and of all my being. Yes, I desire to be His without reservation. May Holy Mary enclose me in the all-burning Heart forever. I surrender myself to His will, that He may live in my person."*

Excerpt from another letter written before profession: "Obtain for me from our Mild Savior the grace that *I become His true and faithful spouse* according to the desire of His adorable heart .... and if this cannot be, *I prefer that He take me immediately from this world rather than to be an unworthy spouse to Him."*

One of her greatest sacrifices was to renounce the pleasure of playing the piano and harmonium. (She entered a Congregation which did not use them.) But she told me: "I am content to make this sacrifice. My supreme desire is to consecrate my life to God."

She made her religious profession on the Feast of Mary Mediatrix of All Graces. The Superior wrote me several times stating she was entirely satisfied with her. She recited the prayers with a prayerbook in Braille, worked in the kitchen, knitted, washed the dishes, swept the staircases and helped in making hosts. I quote the Superior: "In no way is this child a burden on the Community. She works and does not waste her time. *She is happy and well in her vocation* which she loves very much. The entire community is very satisfied with her. She is humble, good, charitable and knows how to be useful. All our Sisters truly love her."

This is the true story of a little blind Moslem girl. This also is the story of a soul which some well-intentioned people thought "did not have a religious vocation."

EPILOGUE OF COURAGEOUS

Courageous is now, in a manner of speaking, a "mother" and I think the circumstances are worth recounting. While at Lourdes, she knelt at the feet of Our Blessed Mother in the Grotto and asked Her most especially that I be granted the grace to foster religious vocations for the blind *in America.* God did, in fact, hear her prayers because in three years time, I was helpful in successfully placing 15 blind or partially blind American persons in religious orders. This

however, is a strange circumstance: While Courageous was praying to Our Mother in the Grotto, at precisely the same time (I realized this later) I met the first American blind girl I was to place in an Order. Normally, I would not have met this young lady, but Providence ordained it thus: This young lady had been invited to attend a party for a charitable cause, but she had received the inspiration not to attend. There was to be some worldly amusements, and she decided to forego this pleasure in order to be more pleasing to God. It was through a series of unexpected events that I was conducted to her room. The day afterwards, the Mother Superior permitted her to go with me to another Institute for the Blind. In this manner we became acquainted and she entered religious life some time later.

I call Courageous her "mother", because I met her so providentially at the exact time she was praying at Lourdes that I might assist religious vocations of blind in America. She is, however, *a "mother who is six years younger than her daughter.*

GRACE-OF-GOD

Grace was exactly the same age as Courageous and they could have been sisters, but Grace was not a Moslem. She was not a "vocation", but her story is interesting, too, as far as our report on "What Blind Women Have Done" is concerned. Despite the fact that she was born blind, her parents kept her with them. However, her father was very harsh and rough with everyone and was in the habit of calling her mother "Mad-Maid" (or Mad-Woman). Her mother died when Grace was about six years old, and when the Sisters asked her her mother's name, the poor little thing replied innocently: "Her name is Mad-Maid".

Her father, after the death of his wife, kept the little girl at home with him for some time, but he was obliged to go out to work, and during his absence *he would tie Grace with a rope of leather to a nail affixed to the wall.* She would have to remain tied there until her father returned. Before long, he decided to send her to the hospice. As explained previously, the attitude of parents towards blind children is very heartless in this country. Her father died twenty years later, but he never returned, during all this time, to see his daughter, although the hospice was in the vicinity.

Grace was one of the laundry girls and was very delicate. She was, therefore, one of those chosen to receive supplementary parcels from abroad. This, of course, was a source of anger for Melanie. The doctor told me: "If Grace remains here, I fear that she will be-

come tubercular and will die very young". However, I did not repeat this to Grace, but said: "If you like, I shall try to find a place for you abroad." She answered: "I do not have a vocation, and I do not want to live with a private family, but if you find an Institute of Charity that will take me, I shall be glad to go there." (To a country where food and other necessities could be more easily procured).

But the battle with Melanie was going on and it was difficult to undertake displacements. At this time, I had already placed six blind vocations from this same hospice, but as for placing an ordinary person (one without a vocation) it was like *moving mountains.*

God in His infinite mercy helped us in a strange way. The Superior of the Convent, who disapproved of all these placements abroad, spoke to me about Grace and another blind girl called Bright, whom I was placing at that time. She said: "If you want to take these blind in order to place them elsewhere, well, *I will give them to you immediately,* but *if you do not take them immediately, I will not give them permission to start.* And when they once leave this hospice, they will *never* be readmitted here." She probably hoped that by using such strong measures, the blind and myself would renounce our intention. I explained the situation to the girls and asked their advice, whereupon they answered with decision: *"We have decided to start."* So I engaged a taxi, and accompanied by a good lady of my acquaintance, arrived at the door of the hospice to pick up the two blind. I reasoned: If God gives me these two blind, He will also give me the necessary means to place them in a suitable environment. I will speak of Bright later, now let us see what happened to Grace. I attended to the formalities relating to their departure and placed each of them with a good family. Grace's story is *like a fairy tale.* First, a good physician issued a certificate stating that she required a rest in Switzerland for her health. However, it was impossible to obtain a visa without a guarantee from a Swiss citizen. At this opportune moment, a good Catholic from Switzerland arrived by plane and wanted a missionary guide in order to visit the country. I fortunately was designated to fill this mission and when at the end of the trip he asked how he could repay me, I took advantage of the opportunity and told him I wanted nothing but *his* signature for Grace's visa. He gave it willingly, and so Grace started to Switzerland and later to France. In a few months she was totally cured of her dangerous weakness and is now happily working in a comfortable home for blind girls.

So ends the story of a poor blind girl who liked to call herself: *Child of Mary Immaculate.*

DIVINE OATH (or Oath-of-God)

Oath was born into a schismatic family which first placed her in a Lutheran orphanage for the blind. As a result the little girl learned to speak both German and English in addition to her native tongue. She told me they were well-treated in this Protestant institution; nevertheless, when the girl grew up she was attracted to the Catholic faith. She left the Protestant Institution and was received in the Catholic hospice and became a Catholic. She made her first Communion on the feast of the Little Flower. After the departure of White Flower, she also told me she wished to become a nun; however, her case was more difficult than the others because at the time she was 39 years of age. I knew that there was *no age limit in the Visitation Convent* and that St. Francis de Sales, their founder, specified in ther Rules that each Visitation institution could accept one or two blind postulants. He also said that if a valid postulant and a blind one requested admission at the same time, *the blind one was to be preferred*, because the other vocation could more easily find a place in another order whereas this was not the case with the blind vocation. I wrote to a number of Visitation Convents and one of them accepted Oath of God.

I told in a preceding story how Oath saved her own vocation and that of three other blind persons by going out boldly in search of their spiritual director lest they lose him.

At the moment of Oath's departure, the situation become more and more involved. Some persons, secretly desiring to prevent her from leaving, sent influential friends to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seeking to have her visa refused. So for three months, it was like a conspiracy against us. When I went to the Consulate to learn the answer of the metropole, I was informed that no answer had been received. However, when some friends of mine made inquiries, they were told by the Bureau of Emigration at the metropole that "somebody" had obstructed issuance of the visa. After this they told me that the visa had been refused; whereupon I filed another petition for a new visa and this time succeeded in a very strange way. I must tell at first that Oath-of-God had a blind cousin called Bright who was sometimes privileged to have dreams which were unlike those of ordinary people. One morning Bright said to her cousin, Oath-of-God: "Last night I had a dream. I saw a Lady who said to me: 'See, my child, someone (and there was a name given) is closing the door of the hospice in order that Oath-of-God will not go out of it. But I, I shall obtain the required visa for her. *Who can resist me? I am Our Lady of the Rosary*'."

NOTE: We are merely citing this dream and the other dream which we will relate in the story of Bright as told to us without

taking a position as to whether it was, or was not, a dream of supernatural nature.

A few days later the visa for Oath-of-God arrived and it was such astonishing news at the hospice that a *sudden thunderbolt* would not have had more effect on the minds of all the people there.

When the visa arrived, we reserved a place for her and for another blind girl, who was going to another Community, on a boat which was scheduled to sail a month later. The person who had so strongly opposed this departure secretly inquired the date the boat was to leave. Assured that there was sufficient time, and secure in the knowledge that he would return before the date set for the departure, he left for a short trip. He was determined, however, to adopt any measures that would prevent the departure. During his absence, the travel company advised me that the date of the voyage had been changed and that it was necessary to start without further delay. So Oath-of-God and her blind companion left without hindrance. However, the navigation company required someone to be in charge of the blind passengers, and the only person I found to undertake the task was the *sister of a Rabbi* who happened to be traveling on the same boat.

Oath-of-God arrived at her monastery on the first of May. She later made her vows without difficulty and her spiritual progress was remarkable. Her chief work in the Community is knitting all-wool dresses and stockings for the Community. She has a deep spirit of prayer and intimate conversation with God. It is, indeed, far from easy to be a postulant when you are 40 years old as Oath-of-God was.

SUPERVISOR

Supervisor was the name of the other blind girl who was starting out with Oath-of-God to become a religious. She was a very poor girl whose father remarried after the death of her mother, and the father and step-mother did not want to keep Supervisor at home. She was one of the laundry girls and had a very energetic temperament. She had terrible disputes with Melanie. One day Supervisor decided to copy the Latin responses of the servants of the Mass in Braille. But Melanie had the only Braille text in her possession. If Supervisor had asked Melanie for permission to copy this, she would most certainly have refused: "That is not for you, laundry girl, etc." So Supervisor asked an orphan who had her sight to notice where Melanie placed this text and to bring it to her in order that she might copy it quickly and then return it

before Melanie realized it was missing. This was accomplished perfectly. But when Melanie heard that Supervisor had in her possession the same Braille text as herself, she guessed the truth and became extremely angry. A laundry girl who had copied the text of a knitter without permission! It was *so monstrous a sin* that Melanie went to the place where Supervisor had her transcript in Braille and tore it into little pieces, tramping on them, while screaming and shouting about her injuries. Supervisor, who at that time was willing to go abroad to a Convent, accepted this tantrum very quietly, refusing absolutely however to disclose the name of the girl who had obtained the Latin text for her from Melanie; this exasperated Melanie still more.

I was perplexed about Supervisor's desire to become a religious because from certain points of view she most certainly did not have the same qualities as the other blind I had placed in religious life. She was, however, so very staunch and energetic in her resolution that I arrived at this decision: Suppose she actually did have a true vocation, should she be denied the chance to realize it? If after a trial period, she discovered she did not have a vocation, she had absolutely nothing to lose from the experience. She would, in fact, remain in another country where everything would be more agreeable to her than it would have been had she remained in the same hospice. Providence helped me in this way. A generous *American* benefactor having heard that I needed help for the blind sent me some very generous alms which enabled me not only to pay the traveling expenses of Supervisor, but also those of some other blind girls I was placing abroad in different convents. So Supervisor was aboard the same boat as Oath-of-God, and under the motherly protection of the Rabbi's sister I mentioned. This Jewess wrote me later that both of them won her admiration during this trip.

However, Supervisor had difficulties in adapting herself to religious life and did not remain in a religious order. Because she had the generosity to offer her life to God, He provided her with a far happier situation both materially and spiritually, than if she had lacked the generosity to make this gesture.

NOTE: During the printing of this booklet we learn that Supervisor successfully entered another religious community.

BRIGHT

Bright, the cousin of Oath-of-God, was also born of schismatic parents, and she, too, entered the Lutheran Institute for the Blind. She remembers that in this Institute each blind girl had a particular benefactress to take care of her. When she was about 18 years old, she left the Institute, temporarily, in order to visit her family. It was during this time that she had the following dream. (I am repeating her words.)

"On October 21, 1933, during the night I had a dream and I saw a Lady who entered the Protestant Institute and said: 'I had here a child whom I love very much. Where is she?' And the people in the Institute said to the Lady: *'Nobody knows you here.'* And the Lady spoke again: 'I had here a child whom I loved very much. Where is she?' In my dream I was behind the Lady and she did not see me. Then the Lady went to a strange place (at the time Bright had never penetrated a monastery) behind a grille and a curtain; there were other girls there. Then a young man appeared and said to the Lady: *'Take her as your own child.'* The Lady held me against her and told me with tenderness: *'I have many children who call me Mother. Why do you not call me Mother?'* At that moment the young man spoke to the Lady: 'Excuse her. No one has ever told her before that You are her Mother.'

"Then the Lady showed me the other girls around her in the place and said: 'You see these girls, they are all my daughters, but I love you still more than these.' I said to the Lady: 'I don't understand all this. Do you mean that you love me more than anyone else?' The Lady replied: 'You don't understand that now. Later you will understand it.' And the dream stopped there."

When Bright awoke she understood the words of the Lady: "I have many children who call me Mother; why do you not call me Mother?" — as meaning that she had to abandon the Protestant religion and become a Catholic. She did not return to the Lutheran Institute but entered the Catholic Hospice and became a Catholic. She remained there for about twenty years, washing linen from morning to night, every day of the week except Sundays and Holydays of Obligation And only twenty years later when she became a religious behind a grille and a curtain did she realize the possible relation between her dream at 18 and her religious vocation.

But her departure from the hospice was also a marvelous thing. She knew that five of her friends had started for the convent, but unaware of the "meaning of her dream," she was afraid and extremely hesitant asking herself if she really did have a religious vocation. On the matter of vocations for the blind, it was a principle with me *then* not to speak first, but to wait until they themselves approached me. I, therefore, had said nothing to Bright although I knew that she was better qualified than some of the others (for instance, than Supervisor, Pastourelle, or Courageous).

This is how she finally reached a decision. When I came to the hospice to take Oath-of-God and Supervisor to the harbor, Bright knew that it would probably be her last opportunity to speak to me, and that it was absolutely necessary to tell me of her decision to become a religious, too. So when I was at the door of the hospice with a circle of blind of all ages gathered around me, just as I was

ready to enter the taxi, she asked to speak to me for a moment privately. I agreed and in a low voice she said: *"Now I have completely decided to enter a novitiate. Please do everything necessary so that I may start as soon as possible."* It was at the last minute, but she did not miss the opportunity. I have already told in the story of Grace how the Superior, at the moment when Grace was leaving, insisted that I "take immediately" both Grace and Bright as a condition sine qua non for their departure.

I placed Bright with a good family in the vicinity and by a providential design, the Community accepting her knew a very important political personage who obtained her visa almost immediately. I had no woman to take charge of her on the boat, but a very good Catholic gentleman accepted this responsibility and did his best under the circumstances. Now Bright has made her religious vows "behind a grille and a curtain" as in the dream and the Superior wrote me: "Bright is a very quiet and peaceful religious and we are glad to have her." The same Superior later accepted another of our blind daughters. We know of five monasteries which after accepting one of our blind daughters, later accepted still *another* one because the first trial was adjudged so truly successful.

Bright, like Oath-of-God, is doing a great deal of knitting for the Community. In addition to this task, by using a special watch for the blind she is able to ring the Convent bell at the proper times.

All the blind we have placed in communities read their prayers as quickly as a person with sight, using books transcribed in Braille. With the aid of these books some blind religious are able to give the reading in the refectory. When a blind person is in familiar surroundings she does not require anyone to guide or assist her. *I have seen a blind girl running alone in the alleys of a convent garden!*

Sewing by hand is the only type of work which they are unable to perform in a Convent (unless they became blind after childhood). I have placed, counting four vocations who did not persevere, twenty-five religious vocations of blind. But I have never encountered a case where a blind postulant, after a trial period, was found incapable of adjusting herself to religious life *because of her infirmity.*

BEAUTIFUL

Beautiful was born into a schismatic family. In her country the girls marry very young, not rarely before 15 years of age. Her father had a wife unable to bear him any children. In the manner of biblical times, he thought this reason sufficient to put her aside.

So after repudiating his first wife, he took a girl of twelve for his second wife. She was only 13 years old when Beautiful was born.

Beautiful was born blind and was placed in a Catholic orphanage. When she grew up she became a very good Catholic. She was very fervent and prayed and sacrificed herself so much for the salvation of her family that, except for one member, all became Catholic.

At one time, the country where she lived was ravaged by war. She was so anxious for the welfare of her family that she prayed: *"Up to now I have never given up the hope of recovering my sight* (though it was humanly impossible) *but if You protect my family during the war, I will accept my infirmity forever."* God did, in fact, protect all her family in a most wonderful manner.

A few months later I brought to the hospice a relic of Pere Sharbel, a monk of Lebanon, to whom are attributed many miraculous cures. Beautiful was in a group of blind who asked me to place the relic upon their eyes. But when I came to her, she refused saying: "I have promised God to accept my blindness forever for the protection of my family. *I do not want to be cured, even through a miracle."*

Beautiful died a few years ago. The last time I saw her she was kneeling with a very fervent expression before the Blessed Sacrament.

JUSTITIA

Justitia was born into a Christian family. In these countries, even the Christians are more or less influenced by the customs of the Moslem people, with whom they live in close contact. It is the custom for the parents to arrange marriages for their daughters and *these girls are expected to approve the choice of their parents.* When Justitia was young she had perfect vision. When she was 12 or 13, her parents thought it time to marry her to some young man from their village. The boy they chose was a "little cousin", I believe, and he was extremely fond of her. However, Justitia had no inclination for marriage, and especially no attraction to this boy. She knew that the custom of the country demanded *that girls accept the husband chosen for them.* Her soul was in bitter struggle until one day she found what seemed to her the solution of her dilemma. With deep conviction and faith, she said this prayer: *"Oh my God, send me some infirmity that will hinder my marriage."* God heard her prayer and a few months later she became blind. The neighbors believed that some evil people had put a curse on her, destroying her vision. But Justitia knew that it was the

answer to her own prayer. She told me: "At first it was *something terrible;* so terrible that I was tempted to rebel against God. But little by little, I came to realize that I was wrong. I received what I asked." She then submitted herself completely to the will of God. The young boy was so in love with her that he wanted to marry her regardless of her blindness, but the parents would not permit this. It is another custom of the country that a blind girl never marries, however, blind boys sometimes do.

Justitia remained unmarried as she had asked God. When I met her she was 63, a very mild person, always ready to help others and especially ill people. At the infirmary she was a capable assistant to the Sisters. She told me: "It is a pity I did not know you when I was younger. How overjoyed I would have been to consecrate my life to God. But now it is too late for me." She was one of the rare blind who was on good terms with both the knitters and the laundry girls. When I wanted to send supplementary food to the laundry girls without the knowledge of the knitters, I would give it to Justitia, who had free access to all parts of the hospice.

She would secrete these parcels of food under the pillows of the weakest blind. Melanie suspected this and it was (in her mind) a new and terrible thing and another weapon in her battle: "See, the Father secretly entered the dormitory of the blind laundry girls! . . ."

LADY (Mistress)

Lady was an extremely pretty girl, but I learned this only when she arrived at her first convent and sent me a photograph as a token of her gratitude for what I had done for her. She knew that six other blind girls from the same country had asked me to place them, and they were settled in different Communities. So through the entreaties of a good sister who loved her very much, she asked me to place her, too. She was not totally blind, but the doctor declared that as time passed she would gradually become incurably blind and would see less and less.

I was in the U. S. A. and Lady was in Asia. The first step was to obtain papers of identity for her. These are sometimes very difficult to get, but happily a good Jewish doctor urged the authorities to grant them. After a lapse of about one year, we obtained her identity papers. It was necessary for her parents, father and mother, to appear in a specified place with two witnesses and then declare, under solemn oath, that Lady was truly their daughter.

She traveled by boat to her first convent. After some time, however, she wrote me that although her intention of consecrating

her life to God was as strong as ever, life in this convent was too contemplative for her. With the help of a charitable priest and a good Sister, we found a place for her in a new Community in Canada. And so, as I write these lines, the little flower of subtropical climates will blossom, we hope, in the snowy region of North America. In this same convent, I had previously placed a girl from Haiti, who became acclimated very quickly. She was, incidently, one of our more precious vocations. The Superior wrote me concerning her: "If you have others like this, please send *many* of the same." She is a colored girl, but not blind.

WISDOM

Wisdom is the only oriental girl from the hospice I have mentioned, who entered a religious community long before my arrival in the country.

She heard that in Paris there was a community called the Blind Sisters of St. Paul, created to receive blind postulants. They actually have 25 blind sisters. Each sister is under the special guidance of another sister who is not blind. (For information on this order, see "The Way of St. Francis," November, 1953, San Francisco.)

Wisdom requested admission of the Congregation of the Blind Sisters of St. Paul and was accepted. But she had to find the money for her travelling expenses as well as her dowry. This was a mountainous barrier to surmount. All her life savings amounted to only a few dollars with no hope of earning more. But she prayed for help.

There was a Catholic scholar of world renown in the vicinity then. When he wearied of his arduous studies it would relax him to talk to the blind girls; there was one in particular he enjoyed speaking with but I do recall whether it was Wisdom or one of the others. He was also a very close friend of the Bishop in this town.

One day after having prayed a great deal for her vocation, Wisdom received *a message from the Bishop offering her, from his own resources, the money necessary to pay her passage to France and her dowry.* So thanks to the generosity of *a successor of the Apostles,* Wisdom started for the novitiate.

Later I had the good fortune to know this Bishop personally, and I want to praise his profound charity towards the blind. Not only was he very charitable as far as material benefits were concerned, but he had assumed long ago the responsibility of hearing their confessions whenever they wished. From the first day of his

consecration until his last Mass (he is dead now) he never accepted offerings for Mass intentions, but offered his daily Mass *"for the intention most pleasing to the Blessed Virgin."*

And I feel, not without reason, that these blossoms of religious vocations of the blind, whom he loved so supernaturally in his diocese, are *one of the gifts of the Blessed Mother to this beloved son.*

With this we are closing the first part of our stories on blind vocations. Part one contains exclusively facts about religious vocations of oriental blind girls. Lady and Melanie were partially blind. Pastourelle, White Flower, and Oath-of-God had only slight preception of the absence or presence of light, but not of color. Courageous, Grace, Beautiful, Bright, Supervisor, Justitia and Wisdom were totally blind.

The next part is about blind vocations of other nationalities.

PART II

(Religious vocations of blind girls who are not oriental, or vocations of occidental girls. These names have also been changed to protect their identity.)

PEARL

In a small village in France not very far from Paris, it was quite unusual to see snakes as it was known that there were very few in that region. However, one day a youngster said: "'From now on every Sunday afternoon I shall make a special trip to the border of the woods in order *to hunt snakes.*" With a little experience and knowledge of where to go and what to do, he searched from spring till fall and very, very often he found and captured snakes in the very place where snakes and reptiles were considered a rarity. What is the explanation for this? WHEN SOMEONE HAS A SPECIAL PURPOSE, WELL RESOLVED IN HIS MIND, HE DISCOVERS MANY THINGS HE WOULD N O T HAVE HEEDED ORDINARILY HAD HE NOT BEEN SO STRONGLY DEDICATED TO THAT PURPOSE. IT IS TRUE ABOUT CATCHING VOCATIONS IN GENERAL AND ON THE QUESTION OF THE BLIND.

The story of Pearl is a simple example of the above proposition. I was leaving the Mission land crossing Old Europe and going to the New World, but the matter of religious vocations of the blind was a preoccupation in all my travels and uppermost in my mind. I was looking, inquiring and talking about it whenever the occasion arose. While I was in Paris I went to visit some friends I had not seen for at least 15 years. When I arrived the doorkeeper told me that they were traveling. Since I was in the vicinity, I decided to stop at the charming reception house of the Canadian "Fraternite Sacerdotale" (32 rue de Babylone). The Superior invited me to stay for lunch and I let him know on the first good occasion that I was interested in helping vocations of blind girls. He responded immediately: "What a joy to hear you say that. Just a few days ago, a person was obliged to leave the novitiate of a Trappist convent because she was losing her sight, and till now she has not succeeded in finding a novitiate willing to accept her." He gave me the address of the girl; but, unfortunately, I lost it a few days later while traveling. When I wrote to this dear Brother, he no longer had the address available. What was I to do? For the next few months, I tried contacting all the Trappist convents and finally, once again, found the lost Lamb. She is now Sister Pearl in the same convent which Bright entered; and the two, the Oriental and the Dutch, are delightfully friends before God.

She was totally blind, a fine musician and extremely sensitive. This pronounced sensitivity was not only a source of generosity for her, but also a source of difficulties and deep sorrow. Before I made her acquaintance, she had entered a new kind of contemplative Congregation. She was so fervent and so generous that she exhausted her physical strength and suffered a kind of nervous breakdown. While not serious in itself, it was sufficient to require a return to the world and she spent eight months in Switzerland for a rest cure.

When Mireille asked again my advice, I knew that another Congregation accepting blind postulants would very likely accept her and, in fact, would have provided a very good atmosphere for her. So I advised her, before seeking admission to this Community, to spend a few days with them in order to experience their type of religious life.

At that time, her younger sister was awaiting the birth of a child and in Mireille's mind began a hard struggle. She desired to consecrate her life to God and through this to obtain great graces of help and salvation for all her family. But on the other hand, she imagined that if she remained in the world she would be able to earn money and thereby give effective help to her needy loved ones. The truth is that in her country Mireille's plan was absolutely impossible. The work given to a blind person is so miserable that even the most industrious earn barely enough to sustain themselves.

I said to her: "I know you want to help your family and you also want to choose the best way to do this. So I shall give you a comparison: You can remain in the world and try to earn money for them. Perhaps you will be able to give them ten dollars a month (the amount in reality was less than this) or you can go to the Convent willing to receive you, consecrate your life to God and in return you will earn *more than ten thousand dollars for your family. You will obtain for them by your prayers and sacrifices a spiritual and material bounty far greater than you could possibly earn through actual labor.*

This idea appealed to her and she started for the Convent. However, she was so sensitive that after the first few days the inevitable impression of loneliness returned and was a hard trial for her nature. Without waiting wisely for a few weeks for the emotion to lessen, she again left the Convent and returned to the world.

ALBERTA, EVELYN, AND RITA

OR

MORE ABOUT CATCHING SNAKES

I explaind in the story of Pearl that the fact that you have the "hunting of vocations" perpetually in mind is in itself a wonderful source of vocational accomplishments.

While I was traveling across Switzerland in order to hasten the difficult transfer of Courageous to another monastery, I was obliged to go to a great many places to complete these arrangements. Switzerland is a delightful country and the Swiss are charming people. I have only one unpleasant memory of my sojourn there. One night I was obliged to remain from 11 p. m. till 3 a. m. in a waiting room, and the steward on duty had received explicit instructions to forbid loitering. Some indigent people found this place very comfortable and had been found spending the night here. Finally, after showing him my ticket, he reluctantly permitted me to wait there for the train.

I remember my travels in Switzerland because, most fortunately, it was the source of a new blind vocation with the help of Divine Providence. I was obliged to remain a few hours in a certain town and during my visit to a monastery the good Superior told me that a few years previously a blind young lady had requested permission to enter their novitiate. However, they refused because "they had never received blind postulants before." I explained that I could place her in a novitiate with very little difficulty. The Superior was obviously dissatisfied with my offer and changed the subject immediately. Shortly after I left for the United States, but I could not forget that in that old Swiss town there was a possible vocation. Time passed and even though I tried to learn more about this blind girl, I failed to learn her identity. After many months I learned that the good lady who had helped me so practically in the transfer of Courageous was in Norway and planned to spend a few days in Switzerland. I wrote asking her to try her subtle powers of persuasion in order to obtain the name and address of the poor girl. She succeeded wonderfully. She paid a visit to the Mother Superior, chatted amiably and won her confidence. In this manner, Alberta (the blind girl) was at last found and was very happy to "knock" at the door of a Community. But, if I had not kept in mind the chance remark of the Mother Superior during my stay in Switzerland, it is very probable that Alberta never would have entered a Community. In this locale vocations of the blind are unknown.

Alberta arrived at the monastery the same day as Rita, another blind girl, whom the same Norwegian Catholic lady "caught" in the following way: While this good lady was traveling in still another country for the purpose of placing blind vocations, I happened to remark: "I know of a reputedly excellent Catholic Institute for Blind Girls, but every time I write to them requesting information on possible religious vocations among the blind there I receive a very polite reply, but *absolutely no information.* Try to enter this stronghold and you can judge for yourself the best course of action to follow."

The good lady arrived at the Convent and began her discreet inquiries on the possibility of vocations. She became acquainted with two very serious and charming blind girls who sincerely wished to enter religious life. The reason the Superior avoided the subject of vocations was because these two blind girls were not yet 21, the age of majority. She felt it would not be best for them, fearing their parents' disapproval.

The good Norwegian lady assumed all the responsibility and finally Evelyn entered the same Community as Courageous and remained there with great joy and satisfaction. She was accepted as a lay Sister.

The other blind girl was Rita, but unfortunately it was impossible to place her immediately. After the departure of this Norwegian champion to the U.S.A., the Mother Superior remained fearful of the responsibility and even opposed the departure of poor Rita. We tried many different arguments in our attempt to persuade the good Superior to permit Rita to leave the Institute. We finally succeeded and Rita joyously entered, with Alberta, the same Community on the same day. This same Mother Superior, who previously had opposed this vocation, was happy to accompany Rita to her new Convent.

ANNA AND LUCY

I met Anna in America in October, 1952. She was 41 years old. When I spoke to her about the vocations of blind Oriental girls, she heard me with a great deal of pleasure. But to her these vocations were a splendid but unattainable dream. Two years later she realized that it was not simply a hopeless dream; but, in reality a true invitation of Christ. Following the example of the first apostles, she left everything and journeyed far away, with no

knowledge of the language of the country, to the Convent which had accepted our eldest blind daughter (actually 50 years old). Her example is magnificent in its simplicity.

Anna is now a religious in the United States. Her best friend Lucy, totally blind too, rejoined her some time later. I met Anna and Lucy the day after Courageous prayed for me at the Grotto of Lourdes.

MERCY

Among our blind religious daughters, Mercy is one of our greatest consolations. However, the story of her vocation is not without struggles and difficulties. In Part I, in the story of Courageous, I told how I met her at the exact time when Courageous was praying before the Grotto of Our Lady at Lourdes that I might be granted the grace to help many other blind religious vocations in the United States.

I met Mercy in a rather strange manner. She was living in a Home for the Blind and the Superior of another Community promised that she would phone to announce my visit, assuring me that the Superior of the Home would be very glad to receive me. I assume she forgot to make this call because when I arrived all the Sisters were out, having gone to a nearby Church to receive the Blessing of the Holy Sacrament. Since I could not visit the Home I asked permission to pray for a while in the chapel.

While I was praying a good lady entered and asked me why I was waiting. I told her I had come to visit the Institution, but the Sisters were out. So she invited me to accompany her on a tour of the building while waiting for the Sisters to return. In the course of our conversation I told her that I was interested in contacting blind girls wishing to become religious. "Oh!" she said, *"I have just that girl you want."* And she led me directly to Mercy's room. On this particular afternoon a party was being held for the blind girls, but Mercy had been inspired to forego this pleasure, and so Providence gave me *my first American blind daughter.* I feel this was truly the hand of Providence because if I had been received by the Superior herself perhaps she would not have acted with the same inspiration as the good lady who took me under her wing.

This same day and the day after I spent a great deal of time with Mercy because the following day I planned to visit still another Institute for the Blind. Mercy undertook to lead me to this place. Although she is "legally" blind she has sufficient perception of light to go out freely without assistance. So with the agreement of the Superior, whom I met that first day, Mercy and I visited this other Institute which was some distance away. Having been in America only a few days I was completely unfamiliar with the customs of the country. I knew that in many countries it would

have been normally impossible for a priest to travel alone with a young blind girl. But I reasoned: Since the Mother Superior raised no objection, I think it is permissible. In fact, Providence permitted this for the good of this vocation. Mercy was hesitant and this gave me an opportunity to have a long talk with her concerning her vocation. I explained at length that it was actually possible for her to become a religious and tried to quiet her doubts. We returned at 7 p. m. and Mercy insisted on my stopping at a public place for a little lunch. I began by refusing, but she insisted that she wanted very much to do this as a token of her sincere gratitude and that where we were going was perfectly respectable for priests and all good people to patronize. As in the case of the agreement granted by the Mother Superior to travel alone with a young blind girl, once again I performed an act of faith in customs which were strange to me. However, when we entered we were not in a lounge, but merely in a section of a snack-bar for light lunches with busy workmen. The high stools gave me the impression of being in what we call in France a *"bar"* where strong beverages are served, and I thought to myself that if this had occurred in France — a priest seated on a high stool in a room resembling a bar — *people would be terribly shocked.* But Mercy assured me once again that there was nothing wrong in my being there. In fact, the other customers paid no attention to us. Now I am a little more aware of customs in the United States, notwithstanding the "acts of faith" of my first few days in America.

At any rate, this long talk with Mercy was the beginning of a lengthy correspondence in order to discover the will of God in her case and the best means of accomplishing it. I believe our exchange of letters lasted about a year.

In matters of vocations, there are often many surprises: (1) The surprise of a soul apparently possessing all the requisites for a good vocation — one that is eminently generous in her desire to consecrate her life to God and finally prefers a worldly vocation. (2) The other surprise is that of a soul experiencing many difficulties in fulfilling a vocation, and these difficulties (external or internal or both combined) are so real that you ask yourself if this soul is truly called by God. Nevertheless, with the help of prayer, grace and strength of will, this state evolves gradually into a firm and blessed vocation.

The second case was partly true of Mercy and she told me some time later when she was a novice and about to take her first vows, *"Sometimes we have to struggle against ourselves in order to follow our vocation, but from the moment a soul surrenders itself to God a complete peace enters this soul."*

She had been totally blind from childhood and when she was a little girl, her parents took her to see a good religious who had the reputation of performing miracles. This saintly man did not cure her, but he advised her to pray a great deal to St. Joseph who is the patron of spiritual life, and to be patient.

In fact her spiritual life became more and profound even among the predominantly Protestant students with whom she was educated, and she was never inclined to follow the spirit of "this world".

She was about 20 when she first felt the call of God in her soul, and her chief desire was to devote herself to His service. In vain, her parents, together with her pastor, traveled to Canada, thinking that in a country of so great faith, there would be more opportunity to find a novitiate which would accept her. Until she was 47, that is to say for more than twenty years, Fabiola longed to consecrate her life to God and never found the means of fulfilling this desire.

When she was 46, she and her mother promised to say some exercise of piety for one year; and it was (if I remember correctly) *in honor of the Passion of Jesus* in order to obtain great graces from God. It was during this period the following events occurred. A good lady who lived in the same town invited me to visit her because she learned I was interested in contacting blind persons, and she was practically in charge of the spiritual welfare of the blind in her vicinity. When I told her that I had successfully placed a number of blind Oriental girls, she exclaimed: "What a pity you did not come years ago. I know a blind girl who *for more than 20 years has wanted to join a religious order* and never succeeded in doing so. But it is probably too late for her now." I answered: "Perhaps it is too late; but nevertheless, I would like to meet her". This was arranged and I quickly saw that, notwithstanding her age, this blind lady had a highly spiritual way of life and it seemed possible for her to begin a novitiate if some congregation would only give her a chance to try her vocation. However, I cautioned her: "Customarily, persons of your age want their independence, and the practice of obedience is too hard a trial for them." She replied: "I have lived with my mother ever since I left school, and I have *always* obeyed her as if she were the Superior of a Convent. So I do not think that obedience will be hard for me."

After a period of spiritual guidance, I place her abroad in a new Community receiving blind persons. She was such an *excellent* postulant and novice that she was later chosen to be *Mistress of the new Postulants.*

It is a source of curiosity to me that of all the blind persons I have been instrumental in placing in religious life, *the two for whom I received the most compliments from their Superiors entered the convent at the ages of 39 and 47.*

NELLY

Sometimes in the stories of vocations, we encounter an absolutely puzzling succession of facts. Nelly was a very courageous and charitable girl who completely overcame many difficult obstacles to her vocation. When she entered the convent a person who knew both her and Mercy well told me: "I do not know whether or not Mercy will succeed, but as for Nelly, I am absolutely convinced that she will persevere in her vocation."

In reality it proved to be almost the opposite. After triumphing over very great difficulties to enter the novitiate, Nelly completed her postulancy and the greater part of her novitiate successfully. The Mother Superior wrote to me on several occasions telling me that she was very satisfied with her. Suddenly Nelly decided to leave the convent and return to the world. With great difficulty she entered another Community later on.

In so far as I am able to advise souls similar to Nelly I would say: My child, if you want to avoid all serious difficulty in your training for religious life, act always very humbly and be docile to the voice of your superiors.

PATRICIA

Patricia also had many difficulties to overcome in order to enter religious life. She did not have the same opportunity as Nelly to enter a rather comfortable novitiate in her own country, but she had to go abroad to a novitiate where poverty is not fiction but a daily rule of life. She succeeded wonderfully in completing arrangements for her departure. By phoning a great distance, she obtained the visa which influential persons had failed to secure for her. She made the long trip alone in a country where the language was foreign to her. The problem of language was one of her chief difficulties aside from the necessity of spiritual formation in a new and unknown atmosphere. But she was a soul of good will to the end. I warned her before she reached her decision: "Be assured that in this convent *you will indeed find the poverty of Christ.*" She accepted this condition and after long months of struggle against

the idea of abandoning so hard-won a vocation, she reached a point where she was happy and firm in her desire to consecrate her life to God.

In a few years perhaps she and Fabiola will return to America with a few Sisters of their order to establish a convent of their own in the United States.

BARBARA

Barbara was a very gifted blind girl whom I placed in the some novitiate as Mercy and the Sisters told me that she was *very capable* notwithstanding her infirmity. I note, again, incidentally, that among the many blind I have placed as postulants none was obliged to return home because of her inability to observe the rule or because she was a charge to the Community.

Barbara was one of the postulants for whom we received excellent letters of recommendation from priests who knew her well. However, she left the novitiate and returned to the world. From my point of view, at least, there would seem that there was nothing to motivate this departure. But sometimes, experience teaches us that God uses insignificant events in order to obtain effects which we are unable to understand.

LOUISE AND GABY

Louise is 43 and she thought that religious life was impossible for her. Nevertheless, she felt inclined to write to me. However, I did not give her much encouragement, but I sent her as mere information the address of novitiates willing to accept blind postulants on a trial basis. She was a very good musician and organist and among the novitiates was a convent in great need of an organist. They replied: *"Not only are we happy to accept you, but we would like you to come as soon as possible."* Louise left many good friends and a good position behind her in the world, but she is happier in giving her life to God.

Gaby entered this same Community under the following circumstances: She was in a certain order when her sight began to fail during her novitiate. This Community, fearing that she would become totally blind, sent her back home. She wrote to me asking my help. Gaby entered the same Community which had already received Louise and Nelly. A few days after her arrival the Mother Superior wrote me:

July 10, 1955

Reverend and dear Father:

Your three grateful children (namely Nelly, Louise and Gaby) *are all worthy of love and consideration. They seem so sincere and eager. It is amazing what they are able to do. They really put some of us to shame,* etc.

Gratefully yours in Christ

Rev. M. X. Superior Provincial

P. S. Louise arrived July 2. On Thursday, July 7, she played the organ for a Requiem High Mass and today, Sunday, for High Mass and Benediction.

CLAUDIA

Claudia was filled with good dispositions for religious life. But she made a serious mistake when contacting the Superior of a Community which accepted totally blind postulants. She attempted at first to conceal another serious infirmity hoping to be accepted without mentioning it. The result was that, after this was discovered, she was absolutely refused even though she posesssed many good qualities otherwise.

BERNADETTE

I have just narrated how reticence on the part of a blind aspirant to religious life caused irreparable damage. However, I know of a case which is exactly the opposite. A totally blind girl of excellent character wanted very much to join a religious order. She was very capable and could type perfectly. She wrote to a community requesting information for admission and they sent her an entrance blank. This form required innumerable things — certificates, recommendation from her pastor, etc. — and Bernadette completed it with no omissions. *There was no question concerning the condition of her eyes or sight.* She sent the papers for admission together with the required recommendation and she received the answer that she was accepted for the postulancy and was requested to present herself on the date fixed by the Superior. When she arrived at the novitiate, it was discovered that she was totally blind. But she had such good recommendations and seemed such an excellent candidate that for the first time in the history of that convent a totally blind postulant was accepted. She has now made her solemn profession and works daily in the kitchen of the Convent.

CLEMENTINE

Clementine had an idea that she would like to enter a religious community. I examined her with this purpose in mind and began to see that she was not a good candidate for two reasons: (1) Her temperament was too moody and changeable to succeed in religious life. (2) As far as I could make inquiry on this point, she seemed to lack a "supernatural motive" for entering religious life but was governed by a natural aspiration for a mode of life more agreeable, she thought, than the one she was living. As a result, I made no attempt to place her.

CLARE-MARY AND MARY-CLARE

Clare-Mary is the youngest blind girl I placed in a Community. She was only a little over 18 when she contacted me through a friend of hers. She wrote me on February 23, 1954: "Although I have only been here a short time, my days here have been days of happiness, peace, and contentment." She completed her postulancy successfully and will soon take her vows. She was the first partially blind postulant accepted by her Community. These Sisters accepted another one, whom I recommended to them about one year later.

TWICE "SISTERS"

If a community hesitates to accept one blind postulant, it seems particularly praiseworthy when one finds an order accepting two blind postulants at the same time and for the first time. There are two cases of this sort in the United States and the American Catholic Press has commented on these several times.

In the first case they are twin Sisters, Sister Francis Therese, O.S.F and Sister Jeanne Madeleine, O.S.F. Both are very capable teachers of music at the Franciscan Congregation, 3221 South Lake Drive, Milwaukee 7, Wisconsin.

In the second case they are the Atanasio sisters. Sister Mary of St. Gemma and Sister Mary of St. Anthony both entered the Monastery of Our Lady of Charity at Wheeling, West Virginia. One became *private secretary* to the Mother Superior and the other is *in charge of a large laundry.*

JEANNETTE

Jeannette is totally blind. For a long time she wished to become a religious, but she was obliged to remain at home until she was 40 because her mother required her services and help. When she finally became free, she wrote to me. At first, the only possibility open to her was in a foreign congregation abroad. She had decided to accept if we did not succeed in finding a place for her in the United States. She knew the Polish language perfectly, so I wrote to several Polish communities and at the same time I gave these addresses to Jeannette. All of them replied that it was impossible. However, Jeannette also wrote to them in Polish and when the Superior of one of these Communities read Jeannette's letter she was deeply moved and thought: *"This poor blind girl was unable to join a religious order chiefly because she devoted herself to helping her mother. I find this worthy of consideration and we shall give her a chance."* And for the first time this Congregation accepted a totally blind postulant. Jeannette had no difficulty and took the religious habit of novice on June 13, 1955.

In the United States there are approximately 30 blind religious who have been accepted in different Congregations notwithstanding their infirmities. We could give other examples but prefer now, in Part III, to give a brief summary of religious vocations of blind persons and their capabilities.

PART III

General Survey on the Question of the Religious Vocations of the Blind (Women)

The New Era for the Blind

Formerly the situation of the blind was not the same as now. Before the invention of Braille scripture, they were unable to receive appropriate and adequate education easily, and their training for a livelihood was extremely limited. In olden times, only *St. Francis de Sales* in his directive for the Visitation Nuns permitted the regular acceptance of blind postulants, considering them *excellent subjects for a Contemplative Order.*

At the present time, blind young ladies receive an education equal to that of their contemporaries. They can read prayers in Braille as quickly as a person with sight. They are trained to require a minimum of assistance and can perform almost all the tasks other women do. In a work center for the blind, I have seen women sewing aprons on an electric sewing machine at astonishing speed. The reader should know that when a blind girl is familiar with her surroundings (a monastery for instance) she can very easily go about without guidance. Therefore, when I receive a letter from a Superior telling me that she could not accept a blind postulant "because the old convent has too many staircases and corridors", I know most certainly that this Superior has no knowledge of the potiential ability of blind people to adjust to their environment.

In fact all this progress in the condition of life of the blind also brought about advancement in regard to the question of their religious vocations. Some orders were especially founded to receive them and the best known are *The Blind Sisters of St. Paul* (88 Avenue Denfert Rochereau, Paris 14. See "The Way of St. Francis", San Francisco, November, 1953) and *the Daughters of Christ the King* (Via Gaveno 78 Angolo Corso Napoli, Turino, Italy). The blind Sisters of St. Paul are a cloistered but active congregation. They maintain a school and a printing press for the blind. The other order, whose motherhouse adjoins the Institute for the Blind (Corso Napoli, Turino) is composed of two classes: The first called the Poor Sisters of St. Gaetano is composed of religious with normal vision dedicated to performing corporal works of charity for their neighbor. The second class called the Daughters of Christ the King is composed of blind religious (a dozen at the present time) who are dedicated particularly to the Contemplative Life. These latter offer their lives of adoration, prayer and sacrifice to make the works carried on by the first group fruitful; to offer their lives to the Vicar of Christ; for the sanctification of the clergy; for the conservation of the Faith in Catholic countries and for the propagation of the Faith in non-Catholic countries; and to promote the glory of Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist. They recite the Votive Office of Christ the King daily. *A candidate to be accepted by this order must be totally blind.*

Blind vocations are also normally accepted in new congregations especially created to receive infirm or weak persons. Among them we note *The Sisters of Jesus Crucified,* a cloistered order, who opened an American novitiate, "Regina Mundi", in October 1955, at Waterloo Road, Devon, Pennsylvania; the Sisters of the Lamb of God (47 Route Du Vieux Saint Marc, Brest, France), a non-cloistered order, who received three American blind postulants and hope in the near future to establish a foundation in Owensboro, Kentucky.

About information on the *"Blind Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament"* (contemplative Nuns) contact the Little Missionary Sisters of Charity, 120 Orient Street, East Boston 28, Massachusetts.

Other Congregations, after receiving authorized permission, accepted blind postulants, (Consult for instance, The Sisters of St. Francis, P. O. Box 31, Rice Lake, Wisconsin.) and we can declare that these trials proved very successful even in active congregations. There are, of course, still a number of Orders reluctant to take these postulants, basing the refusal on this argument: "We are essentially an active Order, therefore, it is impossible for us to accept blind postulants." The argument can be answered with this scholastic distinction: It would seem impossible to receive blind postulants as they were in the past before our modern era for the blind, agreed; blind postulants who are now truly able to be useful members even in a non-cloistered Congregation, denied.

And that is the reason why more and more generally, Orders which formerly did not take blind postulants, with due authorization when required, are making this successful trial of blind or partially blind postulants.

From France the Director of the Crusade of the Blind, Fr. Boury, S. J., wrote me for my Report at the Convention of the American Workers for the Blind (June 1955, Quebec) that in France there are almost one hundred blind religious who have been accepted in approximately twenty different congregations.

If one were curious concerning the number of blind persons who have been actually accepted in religious congregations throughout the world, we can establish this list as a minimum:

	approx.
France	100
United States and Canada	40
South America	15
Italy	25
Other European Countries 'Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Germany)	20
Other Countries	10
	210

So it is safe to conclude that in our times about 200 blind women have successfully entered religious life. And probably this number will increase markedly when Orders in other countries (England, for instance) come to realize that these vocations which they once considered absolutely impossible are actually possible and fruitful. The printing of the Little Office and of some parts of the Breviary (published by The Sisters of Jesus Crucified, Brou, Seine et Marne, France) in Braille is another factor in removing opposition.

The Work of the Blind in a Monastery

Often, upon learning that a blind person has entered a religious congregation, a person will say: "What will they do in such a place .....!" I can reply with conviction: First of all they fulfill the chief purpose of religious life perfectly — *INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH A LIFE OF PRAYER AND SACRIFICE.* And this is exactly the reason why I became interested in helping religious vocations of the blind. Until I was fifty, I had taken no special interest in the blind, but a small event changed my attitude. For a few days, I was obliged to assume the duties of a chaplain in a large hospice which received the blind, and in this group were about *sixty* women. After speaking with them I became deeply interested in their thoughts and feelings. I knew that all spiritual authors agree that *for a life of intimacy with God it is necessary to shut one's eyes to this world.* So, I thought, if a person is blind, he is and must remain in the best condition for a life of prayer. *This predisposition could easily blossom into a religious vocation or into a deep life of mental prayer.* Until then, this was only an academic view, but the facts that are narrated in Part I and Part II of this pamphlet showed me the reality behind this abstraction. With the help of the infinite mercy of God, I am now, so to speak, the spiritual father of about two dozen blind religious vocations and they are one of my deepest consolations in this life.

In religious life, however, blind nuns not only pray, suffer and have intimate communion with God, but they are also useful and active members of the Community. I shall list some examples of the work which they can accomplish very well:

As in civil life there are blind teachers, musicians, lawyers, etc., so these people can likewise serve in religious life:

TEACHERS: in schools, more and more frequently, some one with a knowledge of Braille is required to assist blind pupils who follow the same studies as those with sight. This is a general modern tendency and indeed necessary according to the *Convention of the American Workers for the Blind at Chicago, 1954.* Teaching others Braille, and music, is easy for a blind person. We know of two blind religious who are *teachers of religion* in their respective congregations — one of them being assistant Mistress of Postulants.

PRIVATE SECRETARIES: this work is performed in many instances with the aid of a *dictaphone.* We know the cases of blind nuns who are private secretaries to their Mother Superior. One of them is also in charge of writing and sending out messages for special collections for the benefit of her monastery.

ORGANISTS: Louise, though a person over 40, was accepted in a religious Order and proved to be a fine organist for the Community.

WORKERS: They can knit or weave very well. (At Fribourg, Switzerland, at the Sonnenberg Institute for the Blind, students receive instructions how to operate knitting machines, which has proved to be a very profitable training for them). In some places they are also taught to make altar breads and other worthwhile articles either by hand or machine.

As in ordinary life many duties are performed by the blind, so in a Convent many ordinary daily tasks are efficiently carried out by blind religious:

—to *answer the door* and take care of *telephone calls;* to ring *the bell,* with the aid of a special watch for the blind; *to wash dishes and linen* (we have mentioned one who is in charge of a laundry in a large institution); to help in *preparing and cooking meals* (it is one of the chief works of Courageous and Bernadette); to do simple *work in the garden,* such as weeding, gathering produce; to *feed* animals; to sweep and *clean restricted areas,* especially staircases. More especially they very often take care of old or ill persons (see the story of Pastourelle), and make the *public reading* in the refectory (with a Braille book they read as quickly as persons having normal sight).

Many other examples could be cited but these examples indicate clearly how, with proper guidance in the beginning and with kindly co-operation, A BLIND POSTULANT IS ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH A GREAT MANY USEFUL OCCUPATIONS IN A MONASTERY.

As we have seen many times, *their presence in a Community obtains God's particular blessing on the Congregation* which has such a spirit of charity as to offer them a trial in religious life. To their "spiritual dinner" these good nuns did not invite only the "rich neighbors", but also "the poor and the blind", according to the exhortation which came from the infinite mercy of Our Divine Saviour: *"Go out quickly into the streets and lanes and bring in here to my great supper the poor* ..... AND THE BLIND." *Amen.*

NOTE

The persons interested in contacting the author are requested to write to his secretariat: 3202 McKinley St., N. W., Washington 15, D. C.

For the vocational booklet in pictures *"BRIDE OF A KING"* (available in film-strip too), adapted from Fr. Daniel A. Lord, s. j., please contact: VOCATION HOUSE, HALLATON, MARKET HARBOROUGH, LEICS, ENGLAND.

10 — DALE PRINTING CO., WOONSOCKET, R. I., U. S. A.

SOME WORDS OF APPRECIATION

Rock Island, Illinois

April 8, 1958

Father Jean-Marie J. Bauchet, Ph.D., is well known for zeal in helping "difficult vocations". He is also among the first priests in America to point out the extreme importance and the rich fruitfulness of general aspirancies (minor seminaries for girls). The Sisters of St. Mary, St. Mary's of the Valley, Beaverton, Oregon, are pioneers in this type of institution. They conduct a boarding school for aspirants who, after completing their vocational course of studies, may enter any community of their choosing. The tuition is around five dollars a month.

Father Bauchet soundly says in his *Sixth Letter about Nuns' Vocations:*

"PLAIN ARITHMETIC AND VOCATION. A GOLDEN RULE. If every priest (or nun) in the world would leave after him (after her) two good vocations, the total number of vocations in the Church would be effectively doubled at each generation."

Reading *"What Blind Women Have Done"* will certainly bring a ray of hope to all physically handicapped girls who desire to serve God in the religious life.

May God bless Fr. Bauchet in his vocational work.

Thomas P. McCarthy, c.s.v.

Fr. Thomas P. McCarthy, c.s.v. is the author of the following Guides:

Guide to the Catholic Sisterhoods in the U. S., The Catholic University of American Press, 4th ed. rev., 1958; *The Guide to Aspirancies for Girls in the U. S.,* (in preparation).

COVER DRAWINGS:

Top:—

Left side — SUPERVISOR — (see page 18)
Right side — BRIGHT — (see page 19)

Bottom:—

Left side — GRACE — (see page 15)
Right side, another Oriental blind girl.

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PRICE:— 25c per copy.

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